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Housing Policy for Victims of the Internal Armed Conflict: Return and Resettlement

Ensuring Victims' Right to Housing



Photo: Departamento De Prosperidad Social

San Fernando Neighborhood. 300 Houses delivered to IDPs. Cucuta Norte de Santander

After almost 50 years of armed conflict, Colombia faces the challenge of making the welfare of conflict victims a priority. The Victims' Law (Law 1448 of 2011) requires that they be provided with comprehensive assistance and reparation of their rights. About four million citizens in Colombia have suffered human rights abuses or violations of International Humanitarian Law as a consequence of the internal armed conflict since January 1, 1985. In accordance with official data the victimizations include the internal displacement of 618,000 families, 134,000 murders and about 15,900 kidnappings. The Government of Colombia seeks to end the vulnerability of 260,000 displaced families by 2014. An essential condition for this endeavor is ensuring the right to housing of the victims of the armed conflict, in a country in which, according to the government's own statistics, only 16% of IDPs' households live in dignified conditions.

Since March 2011, the technical team of **USAID Public Policy Program** has been involved in coordinating, analyzing and constructing agreements with government agencies and civil society for the formulation of a housing policy for the displaced population. The technical document that will give rise to a new policy in this area was publicly presented by the Ministry of Housing in February of this year.

In 2004, the Constitutional Court declared an unconstitutional state of affairs in regard to the situation of the displaced population, and since then it has repeatedly ordered the government to overcome the public policy shortcomings that still impede the full enjoyment by victims of their right to housing. Historically, the national government has made great efforts, increasing the budget for this purpose from US \$ 10.6 million to US \$210.6 million, allocating about 104,000 family housing subsidies, of which 41% have already been used to obtain housing.

It is important to note, however, that a large percentage of the subsidies cannot be used because of the extreme vulnerability of the population and the difficulties that the beneficiaries of the subsidies have had in finding housing. The new proposal, developed with USAID's support, shifts



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The new victims' housing policy proposal shifts the focus from demand-centered subsidies to a mixed approach centered on demand and supply and the institutional strengthening that will make 35,000 new homes available for the displaced each year.



Photo: Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano Medellín

Comprehensive Urban Improvement Program in Bello, Antioquia. Built-up for IDPs in an adjacent area to the northeastern shanty town of Medellín.

the focus from demand-centered subsidies to a mixed approach centered on demand and supply and the institutional strengthening that will make 35,000 new homes available for the displaced each year.

This new approach, embodied in a regulatory decree that will be issued soon, proposes the creation of a special governmental unit for the execution and monitoring of this housing policy for victims of the internal armed conflict. Similarly, it will provide tools to enable the nation and regions to work together, through the creation of Regional Housing Management Offices (Gerencias Territoriales de Vivienda – GTV), Regional Housing Plans (Planes Territoriales de Vivienda – PTV), and agreements with clear responsibilities defined in workplan. This is innovative instrument for the execution of comprehensive victims' assistance policies that was developed within the framework of the USAID's Public Policy Program.

Second, The Housing Policy for displaced populations establishes that it will be funded through contributions from regional entities, the national budget, the interest rate subsidy and the family compensation funds (cajas de compensación), All of which are in addition to those from the financial and cooperative sector. At the same time, it proposes new forms of technical assistance and the formulation of projects for the generation of land for development, incentives to increase the supply of housing, and the coordination of the supply with the existing demand.

It is not possible to end vulnerability victims of the internal armed conflict without guaranteeing their right to housing. USAID's support is assisting the development of effective tools to enable displaced families in the country to obtain dignified housing.